Questionnaire to the Captain of the Ehime-Maru

1 **Please state your name and nationality.**

Hisao Ohnishi, Japan.[ese.]

2 **Were you the captain of the Japanese vessel *Ehime-Maru* on February 9, 2001?**

Yes.

3 **Why did you choose the waters around Hawaii for training your students?**

Japan's National Marine Products High School Training Vessel Operation Association determines the ocean training area for each training ship, depending on the number of days of the voyage.

4 **Was your ship anchored at Honolulu Harbor that morning?**

Yes.

5 **Did your ship leave port and head out to sea that day?**

Yes.

6 **At what time did your ship set sail?**

On February 9 at 12:00, we left Pier 9 under the Pilot's command and headed out of the harbor.

7 **How many crew members were aboard your ship?**

20 crew members, 2 instructors and 13 trainee students, for a total of 35 individuals.

8 **How many passengers were aboard your ship?**

No passengers were aboard.

9 **After leaving the pier, did your ship pass by the Buoy "H" while leaving harbor?**

Yes.

10 **When leaving harbor, was your ship's surface search radar operating?**

Yes.

11 What kind of radar was operating?

An X-band 50 kW model BR-3440MA-X59, made by the Tokimec Company.

12 Was your ship's radar operating continuously without pause until the collision occurred?

Yes.

13 After passing Buoy "H", you set your ship to which course?

A course[bearing] of 166 degrees true.

14 What was your ship's speed?

4 Knots.

15 While you set the ship at 4 knots and a bearing of 166 degrees true, what were you doing?

I was on lookout with 2 watch standers.

16 After you pulled in the anchor, did your ship accelerate?

Yes.

17 Your ship reached what speed in knots?

11.0 Knots.

18 Your ship's course[or bearing] remained constant and unchanged?

Yes.

19 Where was your ship headed that day?

[She was heading] for the next training area at sea.

20 Why did you set the course to a bearing of 166 degrees true?

To head for the vicinity of N 14° by W156°.

21 Was your ship involved in a collision with the US vessel *Greeneville* around 13:45 on February 9?

Yes.

22 Where did this collision take place?

I don't know the exact location because the navigational charts were lost, but I believe [it happened] in the vicinity of the publicly disclosed location of the sinking, which was N21°-04.95, W157°-49.58.

23 Can you tell the committee what happened?

On February 9 at around 12:00 we left port from Pier 9 in Honolulu Harbor under the Pilot's command and headed out of the harbor. The same day at around 12:10, we left the course[the sea-lane(s)] and the pilot disembarked[?]. Around 12:15 we passed by Buoy H, and sailed at a speed of around 4.0 Knots on course 166, and waited for the work at the bow to be completed.

Around 12:45, the work at the bow was completed, so we increased speed to 11.0 Knots and continued to sail on, keeping the bearing unchanged.

Around 13:30 ~ 40, suddenly there was an impact which seemed to lift up the stern of the ship, [accompanied by] violent banging sounds that occurred about twice, and the ship came to a halt. Because of the abnormal nature of the impact and sound, I was intending to switch from auto pilot to manual right away, but when I saw the helm stand, I found that all the instrumentation displays were out. Since there weren't any other ships at the time with which we would have any navigational relationship, I wondered what ever could have cropped up, and took a look all around, whereupon a crew member on watch said that a submarine has surfaced in the aft-port direction, and so I looked at that direction, and was able to see part of the submarine from the bridge forward. That was when the porthole windows of the rearmost end on the port side of the ship came into my view, and I [noticed] it was abnormally close to the water's surface. In order to assemble everyone for the emergency, I lifted the microphone of the intra-vessel command[PA] equipment, but the power had already gone out. Around this time, the navigation officer first class and the communication chief, who were in the cabin below the bridge noticed the abnormality and came up to the bridge. The communication chief said that the power was

out so he was going to switch on the EPIRB [Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon], and off he went to turn on the EPIRB switch which was below deck, on the port side of the bridge. I told the navigator first class and the crew on duty to gather everyone together; and feeling I should [retrieve] important documents, I went into the sea-chart room; but once there, I looked out the starboard window starboard and caught sight of many crew members and students at the gathering [muster] location.

Since we had decided that the deck area at the rear of the bridge would be our gathering [muster] place [station] in an emergency, I headed for that gathering place [muster station] to confirm the [presence of] the people, but the waves were already at our heels. Each man was saying in a loud voice to put the life vest on, or shouting "are you there, so-and-so", but no one was in any condition to answer back, clinging to the hand rails and structural parts of the vessel. Soon, the sea-water came up to the bridge, and a multitude of people were swept off into the sea all at once. Nor did I have time to drop the life rafts either. I got washed off the ship and into the sea by the waves, and was placed a great distance apart from the ship in a single stroke. In that instant, I managed to get a fleeting glimpse of the ship, when a number of people were still aboard the compass deck. Later on, all 10 life rafts automatically dislodged themselves and surfaced. As for life rafts aboard our ship, there were 8 boats that could carry 25 each, and 2 that could carry 6 each, but except for the one 6-man boat that capsized, others were working properly. Those who found themselves afloat at sea climbed onto nearby life rafts and dragged others aboard. From the raft that I boarded I [we?] spotted two other rafts nearby, so we rowed up to them using oars, finding other people aboard those. We took the rope found in the raft and tied the 3 boats together in order for us not to get separated, but the other rafts continued to drift away. About that time, the submarine, which we thought had passed by [and had gone on its way,] had turned around and come back, and it was now here, drifting nearby.

I could see 2~3 people on the bridge, and I waited for them to

drop rubber boats, but lowering their Jacob's Ladder was all they did, and till the end, all they did was keep an eye on us, not dropping rubber boats, etc., to us or anything.

I believe our ship maintained a horizontal attitude from the collision until the sinking. In the [final] end, the bow was almost at right angle [near 90 degree angles] as the ship sank. The time felt very brief; it seemed to take only 5 minutes, give or take a few, not even 10 minutes.

I think it was 13:45~50 according to my wrist watch when I got pulled up onto a raft. Nearby, there was a lot of flotsam such as fishing-floats and life preservers, etc., and we hollered and searched the nearby area in case someone might be clinging to them, but we could not find anyone. Around an hour later, a helicopter was circling above us. Momentarily, two coast-guard vessels (one was an inflatable rubber boat) arrived, and began to recover the people on the life rafts. I moved to the inflatable rubber boat, and notified them of our ship's name, call sign, and the number of crew members aboard, and looked in to the other life rafts and checked the head count of those aboard, but some rafts were empty, and I didn't know the whereabouts of 9 persons. I don't know how long I remained at the site after that, but we split up and boarded the two Coast Guard vessels and arrived at the Coast Guard base.

24 What was the weather like that day?

The weather was clear, with the wind from the north-easterly direction measuring 5 meters per second [miles per hour] give or take, and good visibility.

25 What was the sea state (wind wave staircase)?

About 3~4.

26 Were there other ships underway near the collision [site]?

No.

27 Were you aware of the possibility that a submarine might be navigating course undersea along your ship's route?

I was not aware.[of such a thing.]

28 Can you give us a summary of the characteristic features of the *Ehime-Maru* including the ship's size, mast-height, and color?

It is 58 meters [feet] long, with a white hull, and a blue-line [band,] around [the hull] and a whirlpool-like logo in red and blue on the outer wall [?] near mid-ship. The radar-mast in the center is approximately 15 meters [feet] above the water. [water line?]